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Pacing yourself for the long run

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By Hal Higdon

It can be stated with precise mathematical certainty that the majority of readers of this article—unless they change their pattern of living—will:

a) die too soon,

b) enjoy life too little.

This is the burden carried by the average American.

Consider the statistics. Despite easy access to the best of medical facilities, the American male ranks only seventeenth in longevity among the major nations of the world. American women rank tenth in longevity, but their death rate from heart disease is the highest of women in any country. "More than half the deaths in the United States today are caused by cardiovascular ailments and the numbers are growing," claims Lawrence E. Lamb, M.D., professor of medicine at Baylor University and author of *Your Heart and How to Live with It*. "Worse, these ailments are reaching younger and younger people. For this reason, contrary to the popular misconception, our life expectancy has not improved appreciably in the last two decades despite advances elsewhere in the field of health."

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The cause is that Americans have passed into what Kenneth H. Cooper, M.D., describes as "an era of physical passivity." Dr. Cooper, a lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Air Force Medical Corps, is the author of the best-selling fitness book *Aerobics*.

Autopsies on American teenagers killed as soldiers during the Korean war showed arteriosclerosis already prevalent. Autopsies on more active Korean youth, however, showed little arteriosclerotic development. Numerous studies in past years comparing people in vigorous occupations (such as letter carriers vs. sedentary jobs such as business executives) show less heart disease among the former. In one classic health study comparing London bus conductors (who had to climb stairs to an upper deck) with their drivers, the drivers came out second best.

How would public accountants rank in such studies? When was the last time you carried anything heavier than an H&S workbag? How far do you walk to get from your desk to the coffee machine?

Public accountants might be compared to drivers, who also work from the seat of their pants. They face

more mental than physical strain. There also is a period of peak stress. For the driver it comes in rush hour traffic, while the CPA has his busy season after the first of the year.

A person interested in health and a long life might look at the numbers and switch his job to that of a postman or bus conductor. Not necessarily. First, how long has it been since you saw a postal letter carrier on foot—or a double-decker bus? The era of physical passivity has engulfed us all. Second, a study published recently in the *Metropolitan Life Statistical Bulletin* noted that men listed in *Who's Who in America* (business executives included) lived longer than men in the general population. Seemingly this disproved the active vs. sedentary theories; however, there was a hooker. "The favorable mortality observed among the prominent men," so read the report, "is believed to reflect in large measure their physical and emotional fitness for positions of responsibility." Thus, if you stay in good health you more likely will be in a position to make *Who's Who*. (Ambitious young executives, please note.) The question becomes: how do you stay in good health? Particularly as an employee of Haskins & Sells, how do

yourself

you condition yourself during the eight-month "normal" period so that when the busy season comes around you can take in stride the intensive work and travel that are part of the public accounting profession? Some zealots would have you rising early to do a hundred pushups, run five miles, then bicycle to work. This regimen might work for them, but not for you. It gets down to the question of motivation.

What motivates a man to change his pattern of living? One motivating factor could be a realization that unless he does, the odds are stacked against him. The prospects of a person's survival, in fact, may be reduced to numerical terms.

Get out your slide rule.

Take the danger of heart disease, for example. The factors that appear to cause this ailment, particularly among the relatively young, have now been identified by physicians such as Herman K. Hellerstein, M.D., associate professor of medicine at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland. You are more likely to develop premature heart disease if several of the following factors apply to you:

1. Male sex: Before the age of forty,

men are twenty to thirty times more likely than women to suffer a heart attack.

2. Heredity: Sixty-five per cent of young coronaries have had family histories of heart attacks, diabetes, gout or high blood pressure.

3. Cholesterol: A man with a blood cholesterol level of over 300 milligrams per 100 cubic centimeters of serum is three times more likely to have his vital fuel lines clogged than if his cholesterol level were 200.

4. Overweight: For those who are even 10 per cent overweight the death rate rises sharply, by 22 per cent. An insurance study in 1959 by the Society of Actuaries showed that being 30 pounds overweight shortened life expectancy by four years.

5. High blood pressure. Normal blood pressure is around 120/80 (systolic over diastolic pressure in the blood vessels). If your systolic pressure is 160 or more, however, the risk of heart trouble is four times greater.

6. Smoking. In population studies made in Chicago, Albany (New York) and Framingham (Massachusetts), cigarette smokers were found to be two times more likely to have a heart attack than nonsmokers.

7. Reduced vital capacity: (This relates to the maximum amount of air that a person can inhale and then

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exhale.) With low vital capacity your risk of having a heart attack is about twice that of a person with a normal vital capacity.

8. Nonspecific changes in the electrocardiogram: Among people with an EKG pattern that is different from the normal, the risk of heart attack is increased by two and a half times.

9. Mesomorphic build: The person with a muscular or athletic body is more susceptible to heart attack than the traditional endomorph (chubby and soft) or ectomorph (thin and lanky). In addition, people below 5 feet 8 inches develop more heart attacks than taller people.

10. Lack of physical fitness: This brings us back to postmen and bus conductors. To add one more study, in Israeli agricultural settlements, sedentary workers had a rate of coronary disease three times higher than hard-working laborers.

Taking these factors into consideration, it becomes relatively easy (at least with the availability of certain scientific equipment) for researchers to determine a person's likelihood to have a heart attack. It might be compared to figuring the odds at a Las Vegas gambling casino. If none, or perhaps one, of the ten factors apply to you, the odds favor your not suffering a heart attack before age sixty-five. The more factors that apply to you, the poorer your chances become. For example, if you statistically take a group of a thousand middle-aged men, eight will develop a heart attack each year. But if they each have as few as three risk factors, forty or fifty of them will have a heart attack.

Once that occurs another set of odds comes into play. According to Dr. Lamb: "You have about one chance in four of never even getting into a hospital heart unit alive after a heart attack, and less than one chance in two of surviving the episode to return home. A similar situation applies to strokes."

Fortunately, you can improve the odds and expand your chances of survival by eliminating those elements in your physical makeup that tend toward heart attack. Two or three items can't be changed. If you're male, that's it. If you were born stocky you can't change your basic build. Your family history of heart attack is irreversible

(although you can change the family history of your children if you modify *your way of life*).

Some factors, however, can be eliminated by simple acts of will power. You can stop smoking. You can diet both to limit your weight and eliminate high cholesterol. Exercise also will help in these last two factors and can lower your blood pressure, increase your vital capacity and improve the response of your heart. And, of course, the total effect is improved physical fitness.

Perhaps the key solution to improved health is exercise. Unfortunately Americans, while making great strides in science, have failed to keep pace in physical education. The burden of guilt must fall on our schools which, despite installing more and better computers and science laboratories, have failed to demonstrate much more athletic capacity than fielding forty football players on Saturday afternoons. The average graduate leaves college educated mentally but retarded physically.

In these terms, the people of Haskins & Sells rank no better (and possibly worse) than others in the business community. Many partners lunch regularly for business reasons in so-called athletic clubs, yet never see the gyms. In several offices there are fairly regular programs of bowling and golf, under the heading of recreation. The result may indeed be recreation, but not fitness. Bowling possibly helps your agility, but it does little for your heart. Golf has been described by Dr. Paul Dudley White as simply a means of ruining a good walk. But walking eighteen holes on the golf course at least beats riding around in a golf cart. H&S accountants sometimes "work out" on weekends by playing touch football with the kids or shooting baskets. Once a week, however, is not enough to build fitness and the sudden exertion actually may trigger a heart attack. According to Dr. Cooper: "If you can't exercise regularly, you're better off not exercising at all." Regularly means at least three times a week.

Regularly also means an entire lifetime. Regular exercise begun in the spring and continued until winter will get an individual in shape for the busy season—for a single year. To maintain continuous health, however, that individual should begin exercising in the spring of his life and continue into the winter of his retirement. A champion marathoner who stops training soon finds himself unable to go the distance. Likewise an executive or professional should pace himself for the long run of life by exercising regularly and watching his diet. Public accountants become most valuable to the firm after having accumulated twenty or more years of experience and knowledge. But that value may be lost if their bodies cannot keep pace with their minds.

Even during the accounting busy season the difficulties of exercising are not insurmountable, and probably a workout of some kind makes the strenuous audit work go better. The trouble is partly adverse weather in the northern parts of the country, but also continuing non-work schedules (such as watching TV, home repairs and partying) at the same level as in "normal" months. If something has to go, don't sacrifice your exercise. Those who use their slide rules to figure their odds of survival suddenly may be motivated to don tennis shoes for a quick run around the block. The best advice for them is: don't! Instead, lay this magazine down and walk at a comfortable pace (stopping for occasional rests, if necessary) to the neighborhood drug store, or wherever they sell books. Purchase a copy of Dr. Cooper's best-selling book: *Aerobics*. It contains the perfect exercise program for the numbers-oriented man.

Dr. Cooper follows the philosophy that the best route to physical fitness is through exercises that stretch the lungs and cardiovascular system, or, simply stated, those that get you out of breath. Isometric exercises, the big fad several years ago, do not do this and may endanger health by putting a sudden overload on the heart. This also is true to a lesser degree of isotonic exercises: pushups, situps, etc. The most effective exercises in his Aerobics program are: jogging, swimming, cycling and walking. In studies with more than 800,000 Air Force subjects, Dr. Cooper has developed charts and figures to guide the average individual in improving his fitness through these exercises. He also includes charts for sports such as handball, basketball and squash.

For example, Dr. Cooper sets thirty points a week as a fitness goal under his system for average individuals. If you are under thirty, one point can be earned by walking a mile in fifteen minutes or cycling two miles in ten minutes. Swimming 250 yards in five minutes earns you two points. A mile run in eleven minutes is worth three points. The main advantage of the Aerobics program, in fact, is that you don't have to limit yourself to a single form of exercise. There are also different point graduations for men and women in various age categories, and Dr. Cooper even suggests correctional factors related to altitude and weather. People beginning in the program normally do not reach thirty points in their first week, but instead follow a regulated program over a period of weeks and months to reach that goal. Buy the book.

Can exercising be dangerous? Certainly. Nobody should enter into any vigorous physical fitness program without first consulting his doctor. After that, he still should proceed with moderation. Occasionally newspapers

report the death of a jogger, just as they report deaths in car accidents of passengers wearing seat belts. Many people who don't want to muss their clothes either by exercising or fastening seat belts leap upon such evidence as excuses. But again, consider the odds.

One fifty-one year old man did die of a heart attack several years ago while being tested in Dr. Cooper's Air Force program. In the next six months, however, 15,000 subjects had no further heart attacks or deaths. "Just from statistics alone," says Dr. Cooper, "we could have predicted at least three heart attacks and at least one death among this large group of men. At these same five bases, there were 12,000 men who weren't on the exercise program. They sat back and laughed at their buddies. During this period, their group had nine heart attacks and two deaths. So if you ask me how many people have been killed by Aerobics, I'll ask you how many people wouldn't be here today if they hadn't been exercising?"

Exercise not only lessens the chance of heart attacks, but it increases the likelihood of survival should one occur.

Perhaps the most difficult argument to combat against exercise is, "I just don't enjoy it." People likely to offer that argument probably stopped reading this article some time ago. But, do you enjoy commuting? Do you enjoy putting up storm windows? How about emptying the garbage, or sharpening pencils? Did you like the taste of spinach while young? Some things are necessary for survival. People can be educated to like things they once found unpalatable. Consider the alternatives.

What about public accountants and the busy season? "It would be best if your readers could exercise all year long," suggests Dr. Timothy T. Craig of the American Medical Association's Committee on the Medical Aspects of Sports. "Human nature being what it is, this may not be a realistic approach." But accountants particularly can use an exercise program, such as outlined in the book *Aerobics*, to condition themselves for the busy season of the year, much the same way a baseball or basketball team conditions itself for the playing season. A well-conditioned professional thus will be more likely to survive in good health the strains of overtime and travel when the fiscal year ends and the tax deadline is coming up.

Hal Higdon is a professional writer whose interests range from business to sports. The list of his books includes *The Business Healers* (which deals with the management consulting profession) as well as the soon-to-be-published *On the Run From Dogs and People* (about his experiences as a runner in such events as the Boston Marathon). □